

# LIMERICK

## PRESERVATION DISTRICT

### A Brief History

#### *AFRICAN AMERICAN ORIGINS*

Limerick originally developed in the 1830s as a small, rural community of African Americans living between Broadway and Kentucky Streets. Free African Americans worked as house servants in the city and for wealthy residents of Old Louisville to the east. Slaves living in the community labored on a plantation near the intersection of Seventh and Kentucky Streets.

#### *CIVIL WAR OCCUPATION*

With the coming of the Civil War, the area began to lose its isolated, rural character. Limerick became a busy and important military support center for the Union Army. Soldiers constructed a base camp along Seventh Street between St. Catherine and Oak. Wooden barracks lined Seventh Street, an important route for the movement of supplies and troops.

#### *RAILROAD-RELATED GROWTH*

After the Civil War, Limerick experienced an intense period of growth, spurred by a booming economy. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad built repair shops and a planing mill at Tenth and Kentucky Streets to accommodate its growing business. Workers, wanting to live close to the rail yard, built homes nearby for their families. Modest shotgun cottages constructed of brick and wood began to line the streets, and shops opened to serve the growing community. As families prospered, they gradually replaced these modest structures with the three-story brick and stone buildings lining the streets today.

#### *IRISH INFLUENCE*

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the district became known as Limerick, named after a city on Ireland's west coast. Many of the district's residents emigrated from Ireland during the mid-1800s. Religious traditions soon followed the Irish influx. Dominican priests selected Limerick as the location to establish a new parish in Louisville, building the St. Louis Bertrand Church between 1869 and 1872. The church served as a religious and social center for the community, and for many years St. Patrick's Day parade marchers gathered there to begin the procession.



*Courtesy of the University of Louisville Photographic Archives*

*(Continued from Page 1)*

#### ACHIEVEMENTS IN

##### AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION

In addition to the Irish, many African American families lived in Limerick and worked for the railroad. The African American families lived in modest houses built along alleyways. By the 1870s, the prospering African American community had established two schools in the Limerick neighborhood. The Central Colored School, built 1873, stood at the corner of Sixth and Kentucky. In 1879, the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky opened a second school in the neighborhood. The Louisville Normal and Theological Institute, built in 1879 and operated under various names over the next seventy years, provided higher education for African Americans. A remarkable institution, it alone offered advanced degrees to African Americans in the state of Kentucky from Reconstruction to the legal repeal of school segregation in the 1950s.

#### A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

The early 1900s represented a period of transition for



Limerick. In 1905, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad moved its Limerick rail yard to the Highland Park neighborhood in south Louisville, and many Irish workers relocated there. Some of the younger Irish Americans whom had become white-collar workers

moved out of the neighborhood in search of more affluent areas. Meanwhile, African Americans moved out of the houses fronting the alleys and into the more prominent homes along the main streets.

#### DECLINE AND RENEWAL

Through the mid-twentieth century, Limerick experienced a decline as businesses and homeowners moved to the suburbs. In the 1960s, residents responded by organizing the Limerick Neighborhood Association and initiating efforts to revitalize the community. The city officially supported this endeavor by designating Limerick a local preservation district in 1979. In the years since, substantial physical improvements and an annual festival organized by the Association have helped Limerick regain much of its original vitality.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- The Central Colored School was the first school for African Americans in the state to receive funding through taxes. Established in 1873, it stands on the southeast corner of Sixth and Kentucky Streets. It later housed the Mary D. Hill School.
- In 1879, the General Association of Colored Baptists established the Kentucky Normal and Theological Institute to train young African American men for the ministry. Three school buildings still stand on a grassy lot between Kentucky and Zane, and Seventh and Eighth Streets.
- Local architects H. P. Bradshaw and John B. McElfatrick designed St. Louis Bertrand in the Gothic Revival style. Built in 1872, the church replaced a modest frame structure constructed from the wood of Civil War-era barracks.
- The Landmarks Commission saved The Four Sisters, historic houses along Zane Street, from demolition. Various owners have since rehabilitated each of the houses as elegant single-family residences.
- Many prominent architects working in Louisville in the late 1880s and early 1890s designed homes in Limerick. On St. Catherine Street between Fifth and Seventh Streets, there are six architect-designed houses. Three of the original architects lived in the homes they designed at 514, 517, and 529 St. Catherine Street.

## "Reading" Your Building— A Crash Course

Property owners planning to make exterior changes to a historic building should start by identifying the features and materials that give their structure its unique character, as well as its historic and non-historic elements. By taking the time to recognize and understand significant features, you will be much more likely to plan a project that is compatible with the original style of the building.

If, after looking over these guidelines, you would still like more information, the staff will be happy to arrange a pre-application meeting. Staff members can provide additional advice on the character of your building and how it relates to your upcoming project.

Learning to read a building and identify its significant elements is not complicated. Begin by thinking about and answering the questions below.

### **STEP ONE**

Identify the overall visual aspects of a building. Do not focus on the details, but on the setting and architectural context. Begin by working through the checklist below.

#### *SHAPE*

What is there about the form or shape of the building that gives the building its identity? Is it short and squat, or tall and narrow?

#### *ROOF AND ROOF FEATURES*

How does the roof shape or pitch contribute to the building's character? Are there unique features like weathervanes, cresting, or cupolas?

#### *OPENINGS*

What rhythm or pattern does the arrangement of window or door openings create? Are there unusually-shaped window openings or distinctive entryways?

#### *PROJECTIONS*

Are there parts of the building that are character-defining because they project from the walls of the building like porches, cornices, bay windows, or balconies? Are there turrets, or widely overhanging eaves, projecting pediments, or chimneys?

#### *TRIM AND SECONDARY FEATURES*

How does window and door trim contribute to the character of the building? Be sure to consider the



decoration, color, or patterning of the trim. What about secondary features like shutters, decorative gables, and railings?

#### *MATERIALS*

From a distance, what contribution do the color, texture, and combination of exterior materials make to the overall character of the building?

#### *SETTING*

What aspects of the setting are important in establishing the visual character of the site? Think about the building's setback, alignment with adjacent buildings, plantings, fencing, terracing, and outbuildings, and its relationship to the street and alley.

### **STEP TWO**

Identify the character of the building at close range. Assess the color and texture of the building materials as they convey the craftsmanship and age that gives the building its unique appearance. Begin by working through the checklist below.

#### *MATERIALS AT CLOSE INSPECTION*

Are there one or more materials that have an inherent texture that contribute to the close-range character, such as stucco, exposed aggregate concrete, or brick textured with vertical grooves?

#### *CRAFT DETAILS*

Is there high-quality brickwork with narrow mortar joints, or hand-tooled or patterned stonework? Are there hand-split or hand-dressed clapboards or machine-smoothed beveled siding? Craft details, whether handmade or machine-made, contribute to the character of a building because they are manifestations of the time in which the work was done and of the tools and processes that were used.



*Courtesy of the University of Louisville Photographic Archives*

## Limerick— A Railroad Community

The establishment of Louisville and Nashville Railroad operations in the 1870s provided the impetus for the first wave of construction in the Limerick area. The earliest houses were modest frame affairs, simply ornamented with Eastlake and Italianate trim. By the 1880s, developers began to purchase and subdivide larger tracts of land. Upon these parcels they built substantial, architect-designed residences for the neighborhood's growing number of middle- and upper-middle-class households.



### *BUILDING USE*

Today, the Limerick Preservation District is primarily residential, with single-family homes and a number of apartments housed in converted residences. The district also contains several civic and religious landmarks and is adjacent to Oak Street, a commercial corridor.

### *CIRCULATION PATTERNS*

The regular, grid quality of the street patterns reflects Limerick's urban character. Alleys run behind a few of the blocks, creating a somewhat piecemeal secondary circulation network. While a few of the smaller houses front on the alleys, garages, rear yards, and fencing are more common features. Most homes have rear parking or street parking, and the narrow character of these urban lots has historically precluded front- or side-yard driveways.

### *SITE CHARACTER*

Lawns and side yards provide some buffer between houses, but they are generally spare and urban in character. Ornamental plantings consist primarily of foundation plantings and street trees. On some lots, historic iron fencing survives and differentiates among front yards. Raised concrete or limestone curbs edge many of the front yards, creating a clear separation from the sidewalk and right-of-way. Limestone steps or concrete steps and sidewalks lead up to most entries.

### *ARCHITECTURAL VARIETY*

The neighborhood's character varies block by block, representing a range of styles and periods of development. Common building styles include Italianate and Richardsonian Romanesque. A few blocks also contain simply designed Queen Anne and later Craftsman-style houses. A shared sense of scale and massing is seen within many blocks; however, some exhibit an eclectic array of heights and styles. Houses on the blocks along and west of Seventh Street tend toward simpler, and likely earlier, one-story frame construction. Houses along blocks east of and fronting Sixth Street, however, are predominately two or two-and-one-half story, turn-of-the-century, masonry construction.

### *BUILDING MATERIALS*

As a whole, Limerick's buildings appear less monumental and commanding than those typically seen in Old Louisville, although exterior ornamentation is wholeheartedly embraced. A walk down any street reveals a range of building materials from conservative frame construction to brick ornamented with carved limestone. Recessed entries, bracketed canopies, and small porches and

decorative window configurations are common facade elements.

#### *DIRECTIONAL EMPHASIS*

Most buildings have a vertical orientation, which is well suited to narrow urban lots. Even single-story shotgun houses convey verticality by using tall, narrow window and door openings. Houses range between one and three stories in height, and are usually sited on a slightly-raised stone or brick foundation.

#### *VACANT LAND*

A significant amount of vacant land exists within the Limerick Preservation District, especially in the area between Seventh and Eighth Streets. Construction of sympathetic infill housing has been very successful in the past, and similar efforts will be encouraged in the future.

## **CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES**

### **Site**

- is unified by consistent curbing and setbacks;
- has relatively narrow lots and small front yards; and
- has an urban grid street pattern and a small number of alleys.

### **Facades**

- generally have a vertical orientation;
- regularly use two- and three-bay configurations; and
- share a common setback with other houses on the block.

### **Brick**

- is the predominate building material within the district;
- is often accented by terra cotta and carved stone ornament; and
- enhances architectural character through its color, texture, dimensionality, and bonding patterns.

### **Wood**

- articulates stylistic features in cornices, eaves, gable ends, porch elements, and decorative trim; but
- has limited use as a cladding material with the exception of shotgun houses built during the district's early development.

### **Windows**

- are generally double-hung, wood sash;
- are used singly or in paired or composite groupings; and



- often exhibit additional ornament on the first-floor front facade position and in the upper-story gable ends.

### **Doors**

- are usually either recessed into the front facade or are sheltered by canopies or very shallow front porches;
- are often set-off by elaborate hoods or masonry surrounds; and
- include both single, some of which are extremely elongated, and double varieties.

### **Roofs**

- often establish relationships among houses on a given block in their overall form;
- exhibit a wide range of configurations—some complex and some simple; and
- are commonly punctuated by elaborate dormers.

## Roof



## Door



## LIMERICK PRESERVATION DISTRICT



## APPLIED ORNAMENT



## SITE



**CORNICE AND CHIMNEY POT**



**BRACKET**



**WINDOW**



**MASONRY**





*Courtesy of the University of Louisville Photographic Archives.*

## Preservation Principles

Outlined below are a number of guiding preservation principles that are modeled after the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Reading through these principles will help you begin to think about how you can carry out your upcoming project in a way that both enhances your historic building or site and preserves its character-defining features.

### *RELATIONSHIPS*

When evaluating the appropriateness of a given project, the structure, the site, and their relationship to the rest of the district should be given careful consideration.

### *USE*

Historic structures within a local preservation district should be used for their originally intended purpose or for an alternate purpose that requires minimal alteration to the building and site.

### *ALTERATIONS*

Repair is always preferred over replacement. When replacement is necessary, materials should replicate or match the visual appearance of the original.

A high level of craftsmanship distinguishes structures within local preservation districts. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques should be preserved whenever possible.

Removal or alteration of historic fabric compromises the original character of a building or site and should be avoided.

Properties, however, do change over time. Those alterations that have become historic in their own right should be maintained as a record of a resource's physical evolution.

### *NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS*

Additions should be designed to minimize impact to historic fabric and should be compatible with the main structure in massing, size, and scale.

New, infill construction should be designed so that it is compatible with its neighbors in size, massing, scale, setback, facade organization, and roof form.

New construction and additions should also draw upon established stylistic elements to create a sympathetic design that is clearly of its own era.

### *FALSE-HISTORICISM*

Additions that use new or salvaged material to create a conjectural or falsely historical appearance are inappropriate.

### *TREATMENTS*

Chemical and physical treatments should always be as gentle as possible, since harsh methods like sand-blasting can irreversibly damage historic fabric.

### *ARCHEOLOGY*

Historic sites often contain archeological resources, which should be protected and preserved whenever possible. If artifacts are found, contact the Landmarks Commission for an assessment.